Question: Would you be able to provide an update on President Obama's FY 2011 budget for ARS as the budget works its way through Congress?

Answer: The House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee is expected to mark-up the FY 2011 Agriculture Appropriations Bill this Wednesday June 30. Full Appropriations Committee mark-up has not yet been scheduled. The recent passing of Senator Byrd, a long time appropriator, has delayed the start of the appropriations process in the Senate until after the 4th of July recess. The Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee has not yet scheduled a mark-up, but action is anticipated sometime in July. Congressional leaders have indicated that FY 2011 Appropriation Bills are expected to be considered individually on the floor, setting the stage for a continuing resolution and Omnibus package yet again.

Question: Overall FMMI Concerns:
When can we expect Status of Funds Reports that show credit card holder name and AD-700's #'s? How will we close out the fiscal year if we don't get these reports? Why was FMMI released if reporting wasn't ready? GovTrip Transactions need dates of travel and location on FMMI reports? Reimbursement Checks-cumbersome process; is the B-2 requirement a temporary fix?

Answer: Thank you for all of your comments & feedback on FMMI. As you know, FMMI was developed and implemented under a Departmental time table and delayed 6 months to help ensure readiness. Please keep in mind that FMMI rolled out in March, and the first 3-6 months are always our learning phase. We realize it is completely different from how we used to balance our books. One of the "drawbacks" of being first to implement a new system, in this case FMMI, is that we had to bring the system up before it was fully tested operationally. We had no option but to bring the system up based on the Departmental implementation mandate. However, we are committed to ensuring the system provides all that is needed for quality reporting and we will continue to look to your feedback and ideas on how to manipulate the system for data. Some Areas and Locations have already devised some tip sheets or other best practices to deal with the reports issue. For example, the Southern Plains Area Office has weekly teleconferences to go over FMMI concerns and has developed a few standard operating procedures (SOPs) to help with reconciliation in the interim. The Northern Plains Area Office has also developed some SOPs as well. These can be found on the AFM Web site. Please continue to provide these to Michelle Garner, Financial Management Division, and they will be posted on the AFM Web site. Michelle Garner is also working with the Department to find a more efficient B2 type of fix for reimbursement checks. Also, continue to send any other concerns/questions you may have on the FMMI implementation to Michelle. Michelle Garner is also working with the Department to find a more efficient B2 type of fix for reimbursement checks.

Recent news: July 7th – Michelle Garner

On Friday, the Department posted the Spending Detail Report which is intended to replace our FDW TDL. This should complete the basic BI reports that are need to reconcile to CATS. There are many reports available within FMMI BI as well as FMMI ECC. Listed below are the BI reports we are currently recommending for your use:

- ✓ TDL – Spending Detail Report - Located under Funds Management
- ✓ OCP – Status of Funds GL – Located under General Ledger Management
- ✓ PDL - Payroll Employee Level Detail Report – located under Accounts Payable BI Payroll Reports
- ✓ ULO – Un-liquidated Obligations Detail Report – Located under Funds Management
- ✓ NEW – Accounts Payable Aging Detail – Located under Accounts Payable
- ✓ On Friday, July 2, 2010, the new FMMI TDL report format was issued. That report format now includes the traveler name and the travel authorization number (TANUM) from GovTrip to enable offices to identify the source of the obligations and expenditures on the TDL. ARS will continue to work with the Department to format FMMI reports to meet our management and status of funds needs.

We are currently working to develop a replacement for the Incoming Soft-Funds Report. We will continue to work with the Department to "tweek" the reports as well as develop additional reports to meet our business needs.

Question: Is there an update on any process changes in US Bank for the Location Agency Program Coordinator (LAPC)?

Answer: There are no process changes/updates at this time for LAPC's. It is anticipated that new processes and procedures will be introduced and discussed at the upcoming GSA SmartPay2 Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, August 9-13, 2010. HQs will be attending and will share information to LAPCs that are unable to attend. Stay tuned!

Question: Will guidance form HRD regarding submitting SF-52s via e-signatures/e-forms be forthcoming?

Answer: Kit Hoyle, Acting HRD Division Director sent out a memo to AO's that required all signatures to be captured by June 30, 2010. The Electronic SF-52 project will begin piloting this process later this summer/early fall with a few selected locations (still TBD). There will be additional guidance, Webcasts and information prior to the project going live.

Question: Is it possible to review the policy that restricts purchase card check writers to write checks to the same vendor in the same 12 month period?

Answer: The Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996 mandates that Federal payments are to be issued electronically and provides exceptions (waivers) to when paper checks can be issued. Department of Treasury determined that convenience checks are not considered electronic payments. Therefore, convenience checks can only be issued when a Debt Collection Improvement Act waiver is applicable. This is Federal law, not USDA or REE policy.

The purchase card is the preferred tool; however, there are situations when the card is not accepted and a check is to be issued. REE cardholders should review the seven waivers to select the one that is most appropriate for the check transaction. For example, if a cardholder previously selected Waiver No. 2 that describes that the agency does not expect to make more than one payment to the same recipient within a 1-year period and has to make another payment; the cardholder may either re-apply Waiver No. 2 or Waiver No. 7. Waiver No. 2 is applicable again because the agency did not expect to make another payment. The determining factor is "does not expect". If a cardholder knows that future checks will be written to a specific vendor that does not accept the purchase card, the cardholder should seek other vendors or use Waiver No. 7 when all attempts at finding a VISA-capable vendor have been exhausted.

Question: Has there been a change within the approval process for WGIs? It seems as though these have become "automatic" (i.e., processed without Supervisor approval).

Answer: There has not been a change in WGI processing. The WGI notices are distributed to locations several months prior to the WGI due date where they are to be reviewed, signed and returned to HRD. In addressing this individual question, there was a changeover in personnel with the HR Assistant at HQs. We suggest you contact your servicing HR Assistant if this is not occurring in a timely manner as described above.

Question: Any updates on Your Two Cents initiative?

Answer: "Your Two Cents" (Y2C) was designed to give every ARS employee a "direct line" to senior leadership. The Y2C Focus Group works hard to help the response team keep it relevant and on target. The Focus Group comprises employees from all walks of "ARS life" and helps the response team research and write responses to questions received via Y2C that will speak to all ARS employees regardless of where they work.

Focus Group members continually review the ideas and responses, leave comments for responders that help keep responses on target, and meet with the response team once a week. Members include: **Jeff Carroll** (Lubbock, TX), **Stewart Gray** (Ithaca, NY), **Sandy Groneberg** (Morris, MN), **Sara Hake** (Albany, CA), **Mary Beth Hall** (Madison, WI), **Carol Moran** (Ames, IA), **Perry Rainosek** (Houston, TX), **Julie Tarara** (Prosser, WA) and **Candace Wilson** (Fort Detrick, MD).

If any AO's would like to be a part of this Focus Group, please e-mail Your Two Cents

As of June 10, "Your Two Cents" has received over 170 ideas and innovations! Please join the discussion at Your Two Cents, and stay tuned for an announcement of the "Your Two Cents First 100 Days" Initiative, which will unveil actions that have taken place and are underway as a result of the Y2C program. Also, visit the site for a new commenting feature that allows you to weigh-in on ideas posted by others.